

# **IMAGES OF ANIMATE NATURE IN THE POETRY OF THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL**

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis "Images of Animate Nature in the Poetry of the Romantic Revival" submitted by Prabha Anto in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Philosophy to the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, is a record of bonafide research under my supervision. It has not been submitted to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

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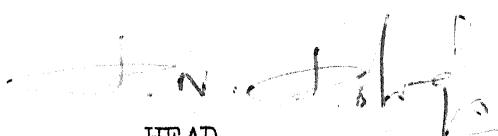
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## ABSTRACT

### IMAGES OF ANIMATE NATURE IN THE POETRY OF THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL

In the Bible we are told of the wisdom that is hidden from the wise and the prudent, but revealed to little children. In Romantic poetry likewise, the poets refer to the wonder and wisdom of the world of children and of the "irrational creatures" like birds and animals. In an age when man aimed at highest reason, the Romantics in their poetry lauded the wisdom of animals and birds. They pointed to birds and animals as fitting counsellors on important issues like art, moral virtue and transcendental vision. They also created symbols to renovate the conventionalised ideas on art and morality. The history of literature reveals that the technique of employing bird and animal images is an age-old practice and as such, the images employed by the Romantics may well be considered as archetypes.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I have discussed the images of animate nature such as those of the nightingale and the lark, as archetypes. I have endeavoured to bring out the archetypal nature of these images by indicating their unconscious and frequent applications in various forms of literature,

namely, fable, sacred scriptures, prose, poetry etc. I have traced the development of these images from ancient times to the Romantic period.

The application of images of animate nature in the Augustan, the pre-Romantic and the Romantic period, comprises the content of the second chapter. I have attempted to bring out the distinct nature of the Romantic treatment of bird and animal images by contrasting it with the treatment of these images by the Augustans and the pre-Romantics. The Augustan poet used animate nature mainly as background for satirical writing. He did not care to make these images true to nature. In the pre-Romantic period once again the focus was on man, but we find some poets like Burns and Cowper beginning to be genuinely interested in birds and animals. However, it is in the Romantic period that we find poets closely observing animate nature.

In the third chapter I have concentrated on the effectiveness of the bird and animal images as symbols of art, by virtue of the parallel characteristics of permanence, beauty and harmony, both in Nature and art.

In the fourth chapter I have looked at these images as symbolic of moral virtues like joy, hope, simplicity, fidelity etc.

In the fifth chapter I have discussed the Romantics' attempt to relate the finite with the infinite, through such

symbols as the skylark and the tiger. I have considered these symbols as fitting sources for the poet's transport into the ideal realm.

In the concluding pages I have pointed out the significance of the Romantic treatment of bird and animal images. I have also touched upon the symbolic use of animate nature in certain literary works in the post-Romantic period. I have mentioned these works as instances of Romantic influence, thereby showing the continuity of the traditional employment of animal and bird images.

## INTRODUCTION

The Romantic concern with animate nature (birds and animals) has received only a superficial and cursory treatment in literary criticism, usually as part of its larger treatment of Nature. The Romantic poets were as much interested in birds and animals as in lakes, gardens and other objects of Nature. The cuckoo, the tiger and the skylark are recurrent images in Romantic poetry and, as such, deserve exclusive and detailed attention. In this dissertation, therefore, I have aimed at a detailed study of the various images of animate nature (birds and animals) in Romantic poetry.

The aim of my study is two-fold, namely, to establish the poet's response to bird and animal images in literature as archetypes, and in the light of this, to interpret the Romantic employment of these images as symbolic. The bases for such an interpretation can be found firstly, in Weller Embler's remark that "If one wishes he may think of symbols as primordial images of the collective unconscious,"<sup>1</sup> and secondly, in the employment of these images by the Romantic poets as representations of abstract ideals.

It is true that poets prior to the Romantics also employed bird and animal images. For instance, the images

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<sup>1</sup> Weller Embler, "Symbols in Literature and Art" Metaphor and Meaning (Florida: Everett/Edwards, inc., 1966), p.53.

of the eagle and the nightingale are consistently employed in English poetry even before the period of the Romantic Revival. However, in Romantic poetry one finds these images saturated with great symbolic significance. The Romantic treatment of these images is more exhaustive and consistent, thus transforming them into powerful symbols. In the course of this dissertation, I shall study the Romantic poets' use of images of birds and animals as symbolic of (i) art (ii) moral virtues and (iii) transcendental vision. In the concluding chapter I shall indicate the significance of such symbolisation in the larger perspective of the Romantic poetic technique.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE ARCHETYPAL RESPONSE TO ANIMATE NATURE

"Huge and mighty forms, that do not live  
like men, moved slowly through the mind"

The Prelude : 398-400

Man's interest in birds and beasts dates from the remotest past and survives in a more or less modified form into the present. The continuity of man's interest in birds and beasts, with special reference to the interest evinced by the Romantic poets, is my topic of study in this chapter. I intend to trace the development of this interest through the various forms of literature like the fables, the sacred scriptures, proverbs, prose-writings, drama, and particularly poetry. I propose to identify man's response to animate nature as archetypal<sup>s</sup>, basing my premises on Carl Jung's theory of archetypal response<sup>1</sup>.

The archetypal pattern of response to animate nature is inherited from numberless generations of ancestors who studied beasts and birds with keen interest. This response is expressed in many repeated and unconscious applications of specific images of birds and beasts. Generations of poets have responded by immortalising these images as fitting sources of poetic emotion. Wordsworth, in the above

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<sup>1</sup> Carl. G. Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype," The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerard Adler (New York : Pantheon Books, 1959), p. 166.

quoted lines from "The Prelude," refers to his response to "forms", felt as slow consciousness or dim awareness - "a trouble to my dreams."

### Section I

The primitive man interested himself in animate nature not only for food but also for the mysterious powers which pervaded the wilderness, in which he hungered, hunted and wove strange dreams. He arrived at some magico-religious ideas about the non-human creatures and assimilated himself to them to some extent. This overt interest in animate nature led to the ancient theory of "animism," by which every object and phenomenon was endowed with a personality. The primitive man observed no distinction in the kind of existence of a man, a dog, a tree or a stone. In the artistically worked up American tales of "Uncle Remus,"<sup>2</sup> for example, it becomes difficult to say whether the actor is really a human being or an animal. The worlds of the human and the animal are never far apart in such tales.

For the myth-maker, birds and beasts were actually persons. The humanisation of animals was not an example of personification, for there was no figure of speech involved.

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<sup>2</sup> A literary creation of Joel Chandler Harris. In these tales, Brer Rabbit is the hero and the stories are titled, "Mr. Rabbit meets his match again", "How Mr. Rabbit saved his meat".

Primitive speech is a more direct manifestation of the community mind than speech that has grown sophisticated. Today when we speak of the beast in man, it carries with it a derogatory connotation. However, in primitive times, particularly in the Palaeolithic age, the hunters were portrayed with bird-heads or animal masks. They were shown as mimicking the movements of animals they pursued, imitating animal sounds, wearing animal skins and so on. The symbolising of bird and animal images is a later addition, arrived at on man's realisation of his separateness in kind from the non-human objects of his senses.

According to Carl Jung the vertebrates were chosen as the favourite symbols of collective psychic substratum. The "unconscious" in man was often portrayed as a great animal - "leviathan or as a whale, wolf or dragon".<sup>3</sup> The myth-maker relied on animate nature for much of his psychology and his vivid description of man's character. The reference to birds and beasts to describe human traits is a technique of the ancient fabulist as well. With him, as with the primitive man, there was no attempt at personification or symbolisation.

Aesop, in his Fables, uses the form of the old animistic story without any belief in the identity of the personalities of men and animals, but with a conscious double meaning and for the purpose of teaching a moral. He succeeds in creating

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<sup>3</sup> Jung, op. cit., p.4

sentiments of awe for the great beasts of his fables. His "Androcles" speaks of the magnanimity of the lion and its sense of gratitude. Similarly, he teaches the lesson on flattery through the Fable "The Fox and the Crow".

Fully a quarter of Aesop's Fables can be traced, with greater or lesser certainty, to ancient Indian sources like Panchatantra, and the humorous stories in The Jatakas which were brought to Ceylon in the 3rd century B.C. These great fables reveal the gift which the Indians possess for story-telling, their sense of humour, terseness, and, entire objectivity. Several of Aesop's Fables, with birds and animals as the principal actors, are identical with Jataka tales. Aesop's "The Wolf and the Crane" and "The Fox and the Crow," for example, seem to be clearly based on the Jataka tales. The conclusion with a moral might well be directly taken from the Indian fables.

The history of the collections of tales where animals and birds figure is one of incredible complexity. Tales of such a nature have poured in from all quarters. Following the technique of Aesop is the Roman fabulist Phaedrus, who put into verse form many of Aesop's Fables. The largest and most influential of his version is that which bears the name of "Romulus." Phaderus' treatment of the animal world does not show marked difference from that of Aesop or other ancient fabulists. There is very little of originality in his works.

However, his successor La Fontaine, in the late seventeenth century, has created many original fables to awaken man to the living otherness of birds and beasts. Fontaine dwells on the "reasoning capacity" of animals and thus tries to refute the Cartesian arguments which seek to make machines of beasts.

Additions to the common stock of stories on beasts and birds have come from a variety of sources besides the Fables. The symbolic dimension from which many of the images is viewed, probably stemmed from the sacred writings of Indian epics and the Bible. In the Rig Veda, for example, the owl is considered a creature of darkness and many supplications like the following are made for protection against it :

Be propitious to us when the owl emits that painful cry.

Similarly, the swan is considered the symbol of majestic elegance in the many stories evolving around the heavenly Urvashi who was discovered among the water-nymphs in the form of a swan. The archetypes of spirit in the shape of animals appear from time to time, particularly in a situation where insight and understanding are needed but cannot be mastered on one's own resources. Paul Tillich says, "All arts create symbols for a level of reality which cannot be reached

in any other way.<sup>4</sup> The Indian epics record the incarnation of deities in the form of man, and occasionally in the form of beasts. For example, Lord Vishnu is famed to have assumed the guise of various animals from time to time in order to defend his chosen people from the forces of evil. The gods Hanuman, Ganapathi, and Narasimha are also identified in animal guise.

In Christianity "lamb" and "snake" are the symbolic representations of Christ and the Devil respectively. The serpent has been associated with the Devil from the very beginning of the Biblical history, starting as it does with the temptation and Fall of man in the Garden of Eden. The Bible has been the vehicle by which much bird and animal lore has spread throughout the world. We can trace the symbolism of the eagle, as the power of the sky, to the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament where the writer explains how God delivered his people out of Egypt and bore them on Eagle's wings. In the New Testament the Evangelists compare the chosen race to the good sheep and Christ to the good shepherd. In many of the parables Christ himself makes use of animal images as the point of comparison. He speaks of the lillies of the field and the birds of the air

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, "Dynamics of Faith," cited by J. Robert Bath, "Symbol as Sacrament in Coleridge's Thought," Studies in Romanticism, 11, No.3 (Summer 1972), 320

that surpass all the glory of Solomon, thus establishing the birds as representatives of divine art.

History reveals how man, from time to time attempted to embody his abstract thinking into images that would render concrete and immediate, the sentiments of his inner thoughts. This is particularly so in his compositions of proverbs, where one comes across a number of animal and bird images. These images assume their metaphorical nature from the sense of close affinity between man and animal behaviour. The traits of man, that cannot be vividly described in human terms, are effectively portrayed through non-human agents. A proverb like "birds of a feather flock together," for example, flash-lights the abstract ideas of group instinct. Many such examples of proverbs, composed to illustrate human behaviour, centre around beasts and birds. Some of the proverbs are : "Dog in the manger"; "Cat on hot bricks"; "Wolf in sheep's clothing"; "A bee in one's bonnet."

For the artist, bird and animal images are often the fulcrum around which he seeks to build his plots. This is seen in the works of play-wrights, novelists, comic writers, prose writers and poets. The allegorical bases of these works, by which the writer seeks to parallel human behaviour with that of the animal, make them interesting reading. Aristophanes, for example, has written a few classical plays on birds and frogs. In the play Birds he brings to ridicule

man's sense of superiority by casting a bird as the main character and through such references as those of Euelpides - "birds and not gods were rulers of men." Similarly, The Bird's Mass is a burlesque composed by the medieval scholars. It is a comparative study on human and avian characteristics. The best example of allegory is the 14th century work on The Bestiary - an anonymous work translated by Laura Loomis. The author here deals with "The Lion's Nature," "The Eagle's Nature," etc., summing up each treatise with a comparative moral study.

Dramatists like Shakespeare and Moliere have also made ample use of animate nature. Shakespeare, for example, repeatedly compares his characters with birds and beasts. Thus, Coriolanus, who is at the start "a very dog.", is in turn likened to "a serpent," and "a steed." The atmosphere of animality that clings to Coriolanus throughout the play is quite remarkable. Similarly, we find that Macbeth is at the start "an eagle" and towards the end of the play "a hunted animal," "a baited bear." Shakespeare is one of those dramatists who have drawn heavily from the archetypal sources in animate nature.

Montaigne among the prose-writers wielded great influence in preserving the affinity between animal and human life. His purpose was not to prove that animals are nobler or luckier than man, but that they are as worthy

of respect as man. This is also the purpose of Romantic poets at a later stage. Montaigne cites many examples of animal efficiency in his "Apology for Raimond Sebond." Here he describes the bees as efficient administrators, the swallows as skillful architects, the pelican as a devoted parent and the stork as a faithful offspring.. Montaigne's work is an example of the ancient thought embedded in the consciousness of a writer in the 15th century.

In the Restoration period, Dryden seeks to benefit from the traditional beast lore, gathered by Aristotle, Pliny and other classical naturalists. References to beasts are scattered through ~~t~~many of his writings, particularly, "The Hind and the Panther." In the Augustan age animal images are used primarily as stock-phrases and hereditary similes. With the emphasis on rhyming couplets, these images come to be mechanically applied. Later, in the hands of the Romantics they were recharged with deep emotional bearings and were no longer mechanically used.

### Section II

Poetry throughout the ages bears witness to the fact that images of birds and beasts have survived the mists of time and the thickets of mythology. Poets everywhere have followed the traditional practice, while often pioneering new ways of thought and new modes of presentation. They have

been irresistibly drawn to these images, thus affirming the fact that in poetry memories are metaphorical and that beneath the private specific memories one finds certain archetypal patterns of response to animate nature. And as Cecil D. Lewis remarks, "archetypes are there for the poet, looming vaguely behind his present experience and his personal memories, mysteriously influencing him."<sup>5</sup>

The poems of ancient Greek writers are the main sources for such archetypal patterns. Homer's Iliad is perhaps one of the first examples to present the hero in the characteristics of an eagle :

As a tawny eagle that rushes on a flock of geese/  
or cranes or long-necked swans/ even so Hector made  
straight for black-beaked ship.

The eagle has achieved its symbolic importance primarily from the stories of mountain-dwelling ancestors who chose the eagle as a symbol for their newly developed cities. For Chaucer, as for Homer, the eagle is the symbol of eminence. Thus, in Chaucer's "The Parliament of Fowls" the eagle is the symbol of royalty. Chaucer often bases his happiest metaphors on birds and beasts. Of Troy in its

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<sup>5</sup> Cecil Day Lewis, "The Eternal Spirit's Eternal Pastime," The Poetic Image (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), p. 142.

misfortune and decline he says :

Fortune Gan pull away the feathers bright of Troy,  
from day to day.

In the medieval period, poets based their works on the impressions about birds and beasts derived from the Greek world. For example, the bird as a symbol of heavenly bliss has been taken from Euripides who in "The birds of God" considers it a symbol of man's aspiration for solitude and transcendental vision. In this poem he expresses his desire to build his solitude "as a bird among the bird-droves of God." Likewise, Socrates' reference to the nightingale in Phaedo, and later Alcuin's mention of the bird with its songfulness, have influenced many writers who have commemorated the nightingale's song. The bird has earned laudatory comments from writers like Izaak Walton, "...the bird breathes sweet lawd music out of her little instrumental throat that it might make mankind to think miracles are not ceased."<sup>6</sup> In England the bird is known through the myth about Philomela and Procne. Shakespeare in The Rape of Lucrece, for instance, gives the

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<sup>6</sup> Cited by Edward, A. Armstrong, The Folklore of Birds (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), p. 191.

image of the nightingale as it sings with its breast  
against a thorn :

And whiles against a thorn thou bear'st thy part  
To keep thy sharp woes working, wretched I,  
To imitate thee well, against my heart  
Will fix a sharp knife to affright mine eye.

During the Romantic period the nightingale is a favourite with all the major poets. To Wordsworth it is "a creature of a fiery heart;" to Keats it is "the light-winged Dryad of the trees"; to Coleridge it is a "sister of love-lorn poets." The poets have also exploited to advantage the traditional image of other beasts and birds. Thus, the image of the grasshopper is a recurrent attraction for the Romantics. Keats and Leigh Hunt seem to derive their ideas of the grasshopper from Anacreonta, the Greek poet, who in his beautiful poem "Cicada," describes the grasshopper as "Tiny philosopher." Keats' "On the Grasshopper and Cricket," and Leigh Hunt's "To the Grasshopper and Cricket" extol the wisdom of the "Tiny philosopher." Their poems can also be considered as the poetic versions of La Fontaine's Fable "The Grasshopper and the Cricket."

Besides the nightingale and the cricket, many images such as those of the raven, the owl, the bat, the swan and the skylark have been built into the various poems during the

Romantic period. The poets on being inspired have sought to project the region of "the unconscious," as Jung calls it. Their poems are an experience of the primordial images of the unconscious, shaped into a form in order to stir man afresh. As great artists they were able to make effective use of these images stored up as archetypes. In their hands, they are raised to the stature of symbols.

In this chapter, I have traced the development of archetypal response to animate nature from primitive times to the Romantic period, by pointing to the unconscious and repeated applications of certain specific images. I have tried to show how these images were inherited from the ancestors and yet were not employed as deliberate imitations. Instead, they were used spontaneously and originally to suit the varying situations and contexts that demanded a concrete and visual use of them. Thus, the snake is to some writers a symbol of beauty. Similarly, while the Greek poets refer to the melodious song of the nightingale, the English poets commemorate its melancholic note. Thus, man's association with birds and animals has originated a variety of literary tales.

Birds and animal images fraught with emotions of the primitive spirit proved to be effective in the Romantics' attempt to tide over the rigid mechanical attitude of their contemporary society. These images helped in speeding up

their "pilgrimage" to Nature. In the next chapter we shall deal with the Romantic attitude towards animate nature, and these images as instrumental in displaying their new attitude.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ROMANTICS' USE OF ANIMATE NATURE AS CONTRASTED WITH THAT OF THE AUGUSTANS AND THE PRE-ROMANTICS

"In every voice, in every ban  
The mind-forged manacles I hear"

William Blake: "London"

The archetypal pattern of response to animate nature created for the Romantic poets a leeway to counteract much of the superficial attitude towards Nature which had prevailed in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. It helped to revive to a certain extent man's primitive emotional attachment to Nature and to enliven the role of Nature from the conventional use of it as similitudes for human passions.

In this chapter I propose to discuss and analyse what may be described as the specifically and distinctively Romantic attitude towards animate nature. I intend to do it by contrasting Romantic attitude with the attitudes of the Augustans and the pre-Romantics. In order to facilitate this comparative study I have contrasted Romantic attitude with that of the Augustan in Section I and with that of the pre-Romantic in Section II. I propose, thereby, to make clear the difference in the varying uses of bird and animal images in these successive periods.

## SECTION I

The Augustan employment of bird and animal images reveal a lack of imaginative consistency. Indeed, the images reveal nothing original, and as such one gets the impression that the Augustan's application of them was rather superficial. The Augustan poet observed only the particular and the material and this he could not universalise save in artificially general terms.

It is the scientific and philosophical revolution of the 17th century that produced much of the artificiality of the Augustan age. The Augustan poet could not break free from the fettering atmosphere of paralysing rigidity and stagnating complacency. Man during this period appears to have become complacent in his "knowledge" of the working of the universe - regarding its working much in the same way as he regarded the working of a machine. Indeed he was happy to employ mechanical images in every form of writing, including religious and philosophical discussions. The image of God, to quote an example, was carved in the likeness of an engineer who had contrived Nature as an excellent machine. Consequently a revolutionary poet like Wordsworth felt it incumbent upon him to substitute a new and living spirit for the old deity - "once alive, but gradually hardened into an idol."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mark Rutherford, "Wordsworth", The Poet and their Critics, ed. H.S. Davies (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1963), p.93.

Much of the artificiality of the Augustan verse is exaggerated also by the poet's indifferent attitude towards Nature. His entire emphasis was on man in his higher relations and he looked with pleasure only on such parts of Nature that served in developing relevant themes. He regarded Nature to find some philosophical implications or matter for satire. Thus John Gay in his famous Fables refers to animate Nature only to satirise human folly. In "The Tame Stag" he parallels the boldness of the-once-timid stag to the coquetry of the-once-shy maiden, thus focussing our attention on the definition of a coquette :

Such is the country maiden's flight

...

...

From tent to tent she spreads her flame

For custom conquers fear and shame.

The supremacy of the poet's interest in man explains the fact that the most abundant use of Nature was in enforcing it as an analogue for human passions. A study of these analogies will reveal that they were drawn from a very narrow range of natural facts. The nightingale, the wren, the bee - these are the most important sources of comparison. The poet chose his similes from facts already canonised by long literary service or from the obvious facts of the words. The lark, for example, has its own set of

applications during this period. Dryden, Waller, and Savage, for example, represent the poet as a lark singing when the sun shines. Waller in "To the Queen," renders the image of the lark highly mechanical by making the Queen the sun who inspires the lark to sing. The nightingale also has its conventional use. It generally represents the poet. It is figured either as singing with a thorn against its breast or as engaged in a musical contest with other birds. The natural history of Pliny and old bestiaries was as much grist to the Augustan mill as the latest paper of the Royal Academy. Nature is to the Augustans the comparatively unimportant background to the human drama and there is seldom any effort to suit the background to the picture.

While the Augustans viewed Nature only as it helped to define something in human terms, the Romantics interpreted Nature as a kind of "Revelation". The Romantics created a universe in which the whole of Nature was felt as a "presence" - a universe in which man saw his own mind as being not different from but integral with Nature. They insisted on a feeling of unity with the external world, as the concomitant, the product of an inner psychological unity. The triangular entanglement of Nature, Man and the Creator was very fascinating to the Romantic poets. The worlds of Nature and man were looked upon as united under some great scheme of things - as being informed by the supreme creative energy.

Therefore, the Romantics recognized in the joyous songs of birds and beasts a resemblance to the song of praise addressed to God. They looked upon material objects as "kind of 'scoriae' of the substantial thoughts of the Creator, which must always preserve an exact relation to their first origin."<sup>2</sup> In other words, visible Nature was given a moral and spiritual significance. The Romantic poets justified this imposition of the moral and spiritual values by illustrating, how, while one's attention is drawn to the interesting qualities of the perceived object, one is made aware of the affective meaning immediately suggested by the object.

On the assumption that Nature (especially animate nature) must have a moral and spiritual aspect, the Romantics proceeded to derive from it fitting symbols of art, morality, and transcendental vision. They attempted to create symbols for their spiritual impulses, selecting such symbols as could be associated with human and divine life. The poets considered these symbols felicitous and capable of fusing diverse elements into a unified pattern. Applications of such symbols in great poetry exemplify what Coleridge remarks as the mark of a true genius : "To make the external internal the internal external, to make Nature

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<sup>2</sup> Cited by Kenneth Burke, "I, Eye, Ay-Concerning Emerson's Early Essay on 'Nature,'" Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 198.

thought and thought Nature - this is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts.<sup>3</sup>

The great mass of Romantic poems on animals and birds is significant in its bearing on the development of a new taste for Nature. The Romantics observed birds and animals to discover some strong resemblance to human life. They studied their habits, their manner of flight, the rhythm of their songs, their care of the young, etc. The universal menagerie aroused them to curious interests. Wordsworth listening to the song that rose from all living things writes:

beasts and birds, the lamb  
 the shepherd's dog, the linnet and the thrush  
 vied with this waterfall and made a song  
 which while I listened, seemed like the wild growth  
 or some natural produce of the air  
 that could not cease to be

Wordsworth: "It was an April morning :  
 fresh and clear"

In the Romantic conception of the animal world the poet achieves what is considered the essential quality of poetry - that it discovers a new world within the known

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<sup>3</sup> Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross, 2 Vols. (Oxford, 1900).

world and that it creates for man, a world where he can be made aware of the living otherness and godliness of beasts and birds. Gifted with this awareness, the Romantic poets, worked out elaborate systems of balance and contrast - often contrasting the animal in its joy to man in his misery. For example, in Blake's "Auguries of Innocence", we see the organization of outer Nature to embody an inner truth. The poem apparently dwells on the animal world :

A Robin Redbreast in a cage  
puts all heaven in a rage

The wild deer wandering here and there  
keeps the human soul from care

---  
The caterpillar on the leaf  
repeats to thee thy mother's grief.

According to Blake, the animate nature is thus a living example of truth, beauty and goodness. The Romantic poets also created the animal world to evoke an atmosphere of mystery, wonder and pathos. The animals achieve for them an intermingling of the human and the spiritual. Thus, Coleridge succeeds in creating the atmosphere of mystery through the symbolisation of the bird Albatross.

The process in Romantic poetry is, therefore, to find in natural objects a symbol of the poet's emotional needs.

## SECTION II

In the pre-Romantic and in the Romantic period, one discovers that animal and bird images are no longer employed as mere background for human action. Instead, they serve as pivots around which themes are developed. A thematic classification of the poems written during the pre-Romantic and Romantic period will bring to focus the changed attitude towards Nature. In the pre-Romantic period Robert Burns, the plough-man poet, arose to prove that the best poetry ought to spring from a life close to Nature. Such a change of attitude from the Augustans, in the pre-Romantics is mainly seen through their fictions - namely, the pseudo-historical fiction, developing into melodramatic gothic novel, in the works of Horace Walpole, Mrs. Radcliff and Monk Lewis. Through them the pre-Romantics expressed their need for a more intimate response to experience. An expression of this need can also be read behind the literary deceptions of Chatterton's poems and Macpherson's "Ossian". However, the poetical works of this nature were meagre and scanty. Few of the pre-Romantics realized fully in what new directions they were breaking away with the classical trends. They, therefore, could promote the rise of

Romanticism only partially or superficially or with respect to one or two restricted subjects.

William Collins, one of the pre-Romantics, for example, was not a dissenter from all classical tastes and views. He shares on the one hand the stiff allegorical personification of the classical school and on the other melancholic indistinctness of landscape painters. But at the same time, his use of animate nature, slight as it is, is marked by unusual originality and imaginative power. There is everywhere present a sense of delight in the wilder, freer, in the mysterious aspect of animate nature. In the "Ode to Evening" he notes such facts as the rising of the beetle in the path at twilight that were not yet stock poetical poetry.

James Thomson foreshadowed the new spirit in various ways; but his chief importance is in his attitude towards external Nature. Unlike the Augustans he shows less of indifference to the sounds of the woods. He frequently recognizes the hum of bees, the low of cattle, the bleating of sheep. The songs of birds, while earlier represented by some general phrase, as "the music of the woods", or "woodland hymns", are now and then made more specific, as in the fine description of "Spring" :

This waste of music is the voice of love  
that even to birds and beasts the tender arts  
of pleasing teaches.

Each poet of the pre-Romantic period stressed one or the other aspect of animate nature not noted before. Mark Akenside for instance, dwelt on the aesthetic and moral influence of animate nature. In his poem, "From the Pleasures of Imagination" he writes :

Even so did Nature's hand  
To certain species of external things  
Attune the finer Organ of the mind

Likewise, Joseph Warton in "The Enthusiast" dwells on the rapturous beauty of the thrush :

Can stow, with all her Attic fanes  
such raptures raise as the thrush-haunted copse?

At a later stage of the pre-Romantic period we find Thomas Gray paving the way for a return to Nature's principles. His use of animate nature is almost entirely in a running assemblage of sweet sights and sounds to justify his preference for country life. In "Couplet about Birds"

there are some exquisite lines as the following :

There pipes the wood-lark, and the song-thrush there  
Scatters his loose notes in the waste of air.

However, in most of his poems, Nature still appears subservient to the human theme; inspite of occasional diversions his poetry is almost entirely conventional in its use of animate nature. Thus, in his ode "On the Death of a Favourite Cat", he is intent on demonstrating the paradoxes of human existence through animal images. He treats of the loneliness of the favourite cat and stresses the paradoxical situation where the favourite beauties are left friendless.

Like his successor Wordsworth, William Cowper, had a sharp eye for natural detail. He emphasises the richness and variety of Nature. His interest in an object is first of all visual, concentrating on the aesthetic effect of the scene. In "The Winter Morning Walk", he sets up an accurate picture of the cattle and contrasts it with the behaviour of man :

They (cattle) wait

Their wonted fodder, not like hung'ring man

Fretful if unsupplied

Cowper's chief use of Nature once again is in connection with man. For him external Nature is still an illustration, a

background for human emotions.

In Robert Burns, however, we have a more direct manifestation of the new attitude of the pre-Romantics, Burns represents the new spirit in his great personal joy in Nature, in his love for animals, and in his accurate first hand experience and abundant knowledge of animate nature. It is characteristic of Burns that his knowledge was wider and his sympathy keener in the realm of animate than of inanimate nature. He apparently thought of animals as if they were human beings. In "To a Mouse" his sentiments are with the mouse. He is tenderly and genuinely sympathetic for the sad plight of the animal :

I am truly sorry man's dominion  
has broken Nature's social union

When we enter the Romantic period we find that for the poet, Nature is no mere background for human associations. Instead, Nature is seen as an influence on man. The poet's experience of emotion in the presence of Nature is identical with an act of introspection, a simultaneous perception of the "inner" and "outer" worlds. The poet, therefore, could easily transfer the attributes of one object to another, so that the images made the two objects unite and coalesce in a just comparison. For example,

in a poem on the robin, the weather is rendered "unruffled", Similarly, the Linnet is among the birds in the grove, "the Presiding spirit".

With the Romantics, the power of their fresh and exact expression is based on their minute observation of birds and beasts. It is this observation that renders the images powerful enough to convey most effectively some abstract truths. Coleridge, for example, discovers the contrasted states of ecstasy and dull inertia that man experiences, in the image of wind and stagnant calm respectively. The Romantic treatment of birds and beasts is in accordance with Karl Jasper's notion that, "the phenomenality of the empirical world is a basic insight of philosophic thought."<sup>4</sup>

The exhaustive treatment of Nature's variety and complexity is the hallmark of Romantic poems. This is particularly true of Wordsworth's poems. He deals with Nature's variety in poems designated by the same title, as in the case of poems addressed to butterflies, the redbreast, the cuckoo, the skylark. The cuckoo is simultaneously "a wandering voice," "voice of the desert," "the erratic voice the breast can thrill." Similarly, the skylark is an "Ethereal minstrel" and elsewhere the "Drunken lark".

<sup>4</sup> Karl Jaspers, "The Perennial Scope of Philosophy," Cited by Herbert Read, "Wordsworth's Philosophical Faith," The True Voice of Feeling (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), p. 209.

The force of Romantics' metaphors and similes emerges not from any single detached image as in the case of the pre-Romantics. Their metaphors are bound to each other and allied to the nature of thought and the development of consciousness. For them the use of images was almost a mode of apprehension. The images were functional rather than merely rhetorical devices. They form the connecting tissues, that hold the human and the natural in a unity that is Divine. Thus, Shelley's skylark as an image of mortality in its flight to transcendence enables the poet to describe the bird's heaven-ward ascent as finally successful and complete. The images in Romantic poetry are generally supported by the nature of the theme - one image emerging from another, each choice of the image suggested by the central theme of the poem.

In many of their poems, the Romantic poets deal with birds and animals. The reference to birds and animals are basic to poems that are directly addressed to animate nature, where the chosen metaphor permeates through the entire poem. Such references are also discovered in poems where the images of birds and beasts are employed as points of comparison. These images form an extremely important aspect of Romantics' style. In most of them one can discover a progression from the concrete reality to the symbolic presentation of abstract truths.

It is quite correct to say that very little of Romantic application of bird and animal images is original. In fact, as I pointed out in the first chapter, many of these images commonly used by the poet can be classified as archetypal. What is new about the Romantics' application of them, is the infinitely varied ways, in which the poets have employed them. The power of disclosure in the likeness of these images to human life is the fascinating discovery of the Romantic poets. On the basis of this discovery they wrote many poems on the animal world, while attempting to put man in the centre of scheme of things.

In this chapter I have tried to show that the Romantic poets' use of bird and animal images was "refreshingly" creative as well as substantially different from their use in earlier poets. With the Romantics each choice was determined by the nature of the theme. Unlike, the practice of the Augustans and the pre-Romantic poets, the Romantics did not limit themselves to conventionalised images or to images serving as mere points of comparison or reference. These images in Romantic poetry are employed with such force and consistency that they become an integral part of the poem. They form an important aspect of these poems, allowing for a progression from the concrete reality to the symbolic presentation of abstract truths. In the next three chapters, I

shall dwell on the relevance of these images, as fitting symbols of moral virtues, art and transcendental vision.

## CHAPTER III

### BIRD AND ANIMAL IMAGES AS SYMBOLS OF ART

The spirit of enjoyment and desire and hopes and wishes, from all living things, went circling, like a multitude of sounds.

Wordsworth -

In the previous chapter I discussed how Romantic poetry derived its power of expression from a minute observation of birds and beasts. The Romantic poets were not necessarily bird-watchers or animal-hunters, but they were observant enough to discover that birds and animals react not only to the need of food and procreation, but also to the needs of finer instincts within. They found these living creatures reacting to colours, to forms, to sounds etc. The Romantic poets found birds and animals endowed with aesthetic and moral sensitivity and, therefore, decided to use them as symbols of art, moral virtues, and transcendental vision.

In this and the following two chapters I propose to discuss the Romantic use of animal bird images as the fulcrum for the different strands of thought woven into Romantic poems. I shall limit my attention to the three main threads of development, namely, their preoccupation with thoughts concerning art, moral virtues, and transcendental vision. For the Romantic poets

birds and beasts were perfect symbols for the development of these thoughts, particularly in their "reflections" of the ideals of the spiritual world. In the present chapter I wish to study the Romantics use of birds and beasts as symbols of art.

The Romantic choice of birds and animals as symbols of art was not wholly impressionistic. Birds and beasts are renowned "craftsmen" and as such may well be regarded as models of art. The French philosopher Theriophile Mariane Cureau in "Anite et Haine," for instance, cites the often repeated theory that man learned the arts from the beasts, spinning and sewing from the spider, building from the swallow, song from the nightingale and swan, medicine from the stork, surgery from the elephant<sup>1</sup>. Writers all through the ages have presented the examples of birds and beasts as great inspirers. Plutarch's crow that raised the level of water is thus an example of practical sense.

The Romantics discovered that birds and beasts were, to use the words of Hume, "naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments."<sup>2</sup>. For them the creatures of animate nature were

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<sup>1</sup> George Boas; The Happy Beast (New York : Octagon Books Inc. 1966), p.13.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by Ernest Campbell Mossner, "Hume's 'of Criticism,'" ed. Howard Anderson and John S. Shea, Studies in Criticism and Aesthetics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), p.240.

more than mere models of art. They served as "media" through which the poet could link himself to the ideal world of art, to experience there the true nature of art. The poet, to begin with, discovered in these creatures an inherent and eternal rhythm unbroken by the intrusion of the artificial. These creatures appeared to the poet as if measuring their movements to some heavenly tune, thereby suggesting an earthly analogue to a divine art. Thus, in the poem "Alastor", Shelley is impressed by the swan that, "scaling the upward sky, bent its bright course/High over the immeasurable main." For the Romantic poets, the rhythmic tread of the beasts, the poise of the butterfly, the melody of the birds' song - all served as reflections of the true nature of art.

However, it was the song of the birds that particularly captivated the attention of the Romantic poets. They found the "speech patterns" of birds very thrilling and expressive. By listening to them, the poets were inspired to a contemplation on art. The song of the nightingale, for instance, arouses Keats to dwell on the striking correspondence between the immortal qualities of both the bird's song and the aesthetic object. For Keats, the song of the nightingale is immortal in the sense that throughout history there have always been nightingales' songs and they have always had the same power of enchantment. The same permanence and perennial power to fascinate also characterize works of art.

The new attitude of the Romantics is seen in the pleasure in such sounds as the call of the curlew, the chattering of magpies, the caw of rooks, the piping of quails, the shriek of the gull. Coleridge, for example, finds the dissonant harsh bray of the young ass more beautiful than:

Warbled melodies that soothe to rest  
The aching pale of fashion's vacant breast.

For the poets the songs of the animate world appeared more melodious and more musical than all man-made songs. They created within the poets an impulse towards "high raptures." In fact, it is through the sights and sounds of nature, exemplified by animals and birds, that the poets were best able to contemplate on the nature of the art of poetry.

The Romantic creation of symbols was essentially based on the realization of an integral relation between Nature and art. In my attempt to show this relation between them, I propose to dwell on the corresponding qualities of permanence, beauty, harmony, truth and universality that exist both in Nature and in an object of art. An object of art provides eternal truth - a truth not made but rather "discovered" by the artist when contemplating the object. The Romantic poet Keats, therefore, broods over a Grecian urn, to realise the nature of art. He dwells on the immortal nature of the truth captured on the

inscription of the urn. In the poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the urn turns out to be the very symbol of art. The poem in itself is more a description of art than of the urn.

Similarly, birds and animals become symbols of art by their associative capacity - namely, by their ability to evoke in the mind of the poet thoughts and emotions pertinent to the discourse on various issues. The forms of their being and of their songs speak of beauty, gracefulness and enchantment; the spontaneity and immortality of the birds' song - all of them authenticate the establishment of this associative capacity of birds and beasts. Weller Embler in Metaphor and Meaning alludes to yet another source of authenticity when he suggests, that "If one wishes he may think of symbols as primordial images of the collective unconscious."<sup>3</sup> In the first chapter of this dissertation I have established bird and animal images as primordial images of the collective unconscious. I referred to the archetypal response to animate nature, seen in the frequent application of such images as those of the nightingale and the lark, commonly employed by poets for specific purposes. I discussed how this response enabled the poets to enrich these images by contributing to their symbolic significance.

On the basis of this associative capacity, by means of which the animals and birds relate themselves to various ideas regarding art, I propose to consider them as symbols of art.

<sup>3</sup> Weller Embler, Metaphor and Meaning (Florida:Everett/Edwards, inc., 1966) p. 53.

Indeed it is the creatures of animate nature that help to initiate the poet's sojourn into the world of art. Thus, in the poem "The Poet and Caged Turtle Dove," Wordsworth wonders whether the cooing of the dove is "to teach her own soft lore/ or second my weak muse?" In the poem the dove is no longer considered a physical creature but the representation of art. Thus, the cooing of the dove is at first a "reproof" and later an "inspiration" :

That coo again! - 'tis not to chide

I feel, but to inspire.

Similarly, Shelley considers the skylark not for its physical presence but for the ideal the poet has in mind. Indeed, the whole poem can be viewed as a search for the identification of the bird. Thus, he poses the question, "what is most like thee?" The nearest similitude he can arrive at is the likeness of the bird to "a poet hidden in the light of thought." The characteristics of the poet and the bird are, so to say, brought together into a unified pattern at once powerful in its appeal to our imagination. The parity between the poet and the skylark is established by the fact that both of them are representatives of art - the poet through his poetry and the bird through its song.

The creation of symbols from animate nature was made possible, as mentioned earlier, because of the sense of permanence that the poet discovered in it. The Romantic quest and discovery of permanence can be seen as a reaction to the constant, meaningless, uncontrollable flux sensed in the poet's own emotions and in the world around him. Thus, Keats listening to the nightingale becomes keenly conscious of his own limitations, "Thou were not born for death," he tells the bird, thus, signifying his own weak and perishable nature. For Keats the nightingale's song is not only immortal but timeless as well. The timelessness of the song suggests to him the picture of ancient emperors and the sad plight of Ruth. Thus, in Keats' mind the permanence of animate nature becomes associated with the immortality of art. In the poem, "On the Grasshopper and Cricket," he values these insects as creators of an eternal art - "The poetry of earth is ceasing never," and again "the poetry of earth is never dead."

Similarly, Wordsworth was "haunted by the enormous permanences of Nature."<sup>4</sup> He tended to see in images like the cuckoo and the thrush a form of immortality which stands in sharp and often ironic contrast to the evanescence of human life. In the poem "To the Cuckoo," he commends the bird for continuing with its song, against all odds :

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<sup>4</sup> Cited by David Perkins, "The Linking of man and Nature," The Quest for Permanence (Massachusetts : Harvard University Press, 1965), p.33.

The lordly eagle-race through hostile search may perish  
... Soft gales shall spread thy wing  
And thy erratic voice be faithful to the spring.

The "erratic voice" of the cuckoo was to Wordsworth a perennial source of joy. He often had recourse to animate nature in the belief that man can rely on the saving power of Nature. Thus, in "Vernal Ode," he writes :

Her procreant vigils Nature keeps  
...  
And saves the peopled fields of earth  
From dread of emptiness and dearth.

Wordsworth was not only "haunted" by the permanence of Nature but also by the beauty of it. In his Lyrical Ballads he refers to the twin characteristics of Nature that can arouse the passions of man - "The passions of men," he says, "are incorporated, with the beautiful and permanent forms of Nature." The Romantic poets were keenly aware of beauty but they had their own notion regarding it. They did not consider beauty as something confined to certain classes of experience known and acknowledged. On the contrary, they considered it as a final quality of reality revealed through visible things. They were convinced that "the objects of the place, the scaly

serpents, the savage beasts and poisonous insects how terrible soever, or how contrary to human nature, are beauteous in themselves and fit to raise our thoughts in admiration of that divine wisdom so far superior to our short views!"<sup>5</sup>

I propose to illustrate the Romantics' idea of beauty through examples taken from their poems. The Romantics unanimously considered the swan as an unparalleled symbol of beauty. Coleridge in "Lewti", for example, appears delighted at the sight of swans. Their beauty distracts him from the experience of Lewti's unkindness. The spectacle of these beautiful birds creates pleasing sentiments in him. It is for him a source of great inspiration :

O beauteous birds! 'tis such a pleasure  
to see you move beneath the moon.

The sight of swans is a rewarding experience for him. Likewise Keats also thinks of the image of the swan as most opportune, when thinking of imitating Spenser. He considers the swan as the most appropriate vehicle when referring to his artistic aspirations. Thus, in his poem on "Imitation of Spenser," he describes the bird as it reflects its beauty in the "bright waters" of the lake :

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper, "The Moralist: A Rhapsody," Anthology of Romanticism, ed. Ernest Bernbaum (New York : The Roland Press Company, 1933), p.5.

There saw the swan his neck of arched snow  
And oared himself along with majesty  
Sparkled his jetty eyes, his feet did show  
Beneath the waves like Africa's ebony.

The beauty of the swan in its "jetty eyes" and feet like "Africa's ebony" makes a great impact on the poet.

For Wordsworth the swans are a constant source of poetic creation, associated as they are with his memories of childhood days in Grasmere. He often conjures up the picture of the swan in order to arrive at the characteristics of a graceful person. Thus, in "Dion" the princely character is symbolised as a swan - an emblem of all that is beautiful and elegant :

Behold the mantling spirit of reserve  
Fashions his neck, into a goodly curve  
An arch thrown back between luxuriant wings.

The swan in Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound" is likewise an analogue for the development of a character. Thus "Asia" in the poem compares her enchanted state to the image of a sleeping swan :

My soul is an enchanted boat  
which, like a sleeping swan doth float  
Upon the silvery waves of thy sweet singing.

Another reference to the beauty of birds is seen in a different stanza of the same poem. Both Ione and Panthea appear dazzled by the beauty of doves. Their beauty arouses Ione to artistic expression:

Their beauty gives me voice : See how they float  
One their sustaining wings

...

Their soft smiles light the air like a star's fire.

For Shelley the swans that glide on symbolic rivers of life and the doves that sail through air are central to his system of values.

Beasts and birds are not only themselves objects of beauty but are also susceptible to the presence of beauty in others. Beasts recognize the beauty of their own kind as seen in the custom of cat's in time of danger to save one of their litter that is most promising aesthetically, and that of eagles to kill their ugly offspring. Thus, Shelley in "The Witch of Atlas," points to the impact of beauty on the lion cubs and the pards. At the sight of the witch, a representation of beauty, the cubs forego their inborn thirst for blood and the pard, "unstrung his sinews at her feet." A similar instance of reaction to beauty is alluded to in Wordsworth's poem, "Water Fowls." Here, Wordsworth describes the birds as being

conscious of their own fair image :

They tempt the water, or the gleaming ice  
to show them a fair image, 'tis themselves  
Their own fair forms, upon the glimmering plain.

The consciousness of beauty in birds and beasts is thus exemplified in many of the Romantic poems.

The Romantic poets allude to the aesthetic sense of the birds by their description of them as great "architects." They appear to the poets as exhibiting much foresight in the shaping of nests in lining them and protecting them from the rain and winds. Their architectural skill is described by Wordsworth in the following poems : "A Wren's Nest," "A Sparrow's Nest," "The Wild Duck's Nest." The Wren's nest is "the prettiest of the grove." Similarly, the duck's nest is something that "words cannot paint." It surpasses even the grandeur of "sylvan bower" of the "Imperial Consort." :

... a hollow crown  
of golden leaves inlaid with silver down,  
fine as the mother's softest plume allow.

The creatures of animate nature are thus not only themselves beautiful but are also endowed with susceptibility to beauty

in others. Hence, they are appropriate symbols of art.

The Romantics considered everything in Nature beautiful due to the inherent rhythm that continues unaffected by any force whatever. They attributed Nature's beauty to the harmony that prevails in it. According to T. Solve, "The creations of art, bathed in the light of beauty impress themselves upon the mind as embodiments of truth and harmony."<sup>6</sup> Beauty as the Romantics perceived it, depended on the existence of a harmonious form. In the poem "To Nature," for instance, Shelley refers to the effect of harmony on art :

The touch of Nature's art  
Harmonizes heart to heart.

Shelley considered harmony as essential to Nature to counter-balance and set to symmetrical order whatever is disproportionate.

Like Shelley, Wordsworth was also greatly impressed by Nature's harmony. In the harmony of the bird's lay, he often found the representation of ideal art. In the song of the cuckoo, the harmonious blending of notes strikes him as something unique and unparalleled :

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<sup>5</sup> Melvin. T. Solve, "Poetry," Shelley-His Theory of Poetry (New York : Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 135.

Not the whole warbling grove in concert heard  
When sunshine follows shower, the breast can thrill  
Like the first summons, cuckoo! of thy bill  
With the twin notes inseparably paired.

Wordsworth also experiences a sense of harmony in the activity of the butterfly. The butterfly reclining against the flower speaks to him of order, balance and beauty :

I've watched you now a full half-hour  
Self-poised upon that yellow flower.

It is no wonder that Wordsworth often turned to Nature to discover similar instances of harmony and rhythm, poise and beauty.

Wordsworth also discovered in birds the best illustration of his celebrated poetic theory of "spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions." The rapturous song of birds appealed to him as a direct contrast to the affectations and artificiality of the poetic practices of his day. The Romantics discovered the song of the bird to be a radar to tide over the chilling effects of the age on beauty and art. The nightingale, therefore, is more than a physical bird to Coleridge. It is "a sister of love-lorn poets." The bird is the inspirer of poets struggling for inspiration. Coleridge himself appears to have derived the inspiration to "thousand phantasies" from the song of the bird.

Listening to the song of the bird he no longer considers himself love-lorn.

The skylark is Shelley's ideal of poetic perfection. Its skill to soar high and to "pant forth a flood of rapture" makes it the embodiment of the poet's ideals. The bird as a symbol of poetic perfection is no longer a part of the circumscribing world. Instead, it is the "scorner of the ground." In its physical appearance, though still a bird to the poet it is also a sprite, symbolising the ideal realm of art. Thus, Shelley addresses the bird, both as bird and sprite :

Teach us, sprite or bird  
What sweet thoughts are thine.

The transformation of birds and beasts into symbols of ideas, can be seen as the Romantic attempt to relate everything in Nature to man. The poet considered the birds and beasts not so much for what in actuality they are, but for what they represented or symbolised. Wordsworth alludes to this Romantic trend when he says, "objects derive their influence not from what they are in themselves but from such as are bestowed upon them by minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects."<sup>7</sup> It is on the basis of this belief that they sought to create symbols out of animate nature.

<sup>7</sup> Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads, ed. de Selincourt. (Oxford, 1940).

For the Romantic poets the aesthetic experience suggested by the objects of external world proved to be an experience in a purified form. It was a transcendental experience allowing the poet to rise above the crippling theories of poetry. It enabled the artist to perceive through his imagination, the ideals of his aspirations. This aesthetic experience was something personal and yet capable of being shared by others. Hence, the poet's ideal world always bordered on the actuality of the human world. The poet, still rooted to the ground, could envisage the possibilities of breaking through to new areas in poetic creation. It is not that the Romantics deliberately sought novelty for its own sake. But the "cloud of mind" as Shelley said, "was discharging its collected lightning."<sup>8</sup>

The Romantic choice of animal and bird symbols inspired the poet to new themes and newer symbols. His choice of these symbols was governed by the fact that they are "more durable," by which our elementary feeling would be more forcibly communicated.<sup>9</sup> He discovered them to be powerful impressions of universal truths. They served as the media through which the poet achieved his transition from the materialistic world of the 18th century England to the ideal world of artistic perfection.

In this chapter I have dwelt on the viability of the animal and bird images in carving out a separate kingdom of

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<sup>8</sup> Shelley, Preface to Prometheus Unbound, ed. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1905).

<sup>9</sup> Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross.

art for the Romantic poets. I have attempted to link animate nature to art by focussing on the corresponding harmony and universality in animate nature and art. I have discussed how animals and birds become symbolic by their associative capacity, their "transparency" in reflecting the ideal of artistic perfection. In the last paragraphs I dwelt on the purpose of the poets in approaching animate nature - namely, to reflect on the nature of art itself. Finally, I have attempted to show the factors that governed the Romantic choice of animal and bird images, and the techniques they employed to convert them into representations of art - into symbols of art.

## CHAPTER IV

### BIRD AND ANIMAL IMAGES AS SYMBOLS OF MORAL VIRTUE

"All creatures met in peace, from fierceness free,  
And no pride blended with their dignity."

Wordsworth : Vernal Ode

Coleridge in "Biographia Literaria" argues that, "no object of sense is sublime in itself - but only as far as I make it a symbol of some idea!" In the previous chapter I have tried to show how the Romantics created symbols of art on the basis of some corresponding characteristics like permanence, beauty, universality, harmony, found in objects of animate nature and of art. In this chapter I intend to discuss their use of objects of animate nature as symbols of moral virtues, such as, joy, peace, hope, loyalty and simplicity.

Romanticism, as Morse Peckham sees it, is primarily a revolution in ideas and arts.<sup>1</sup> Idea and art are the main instruments with which the Romantics displayed their new attitude towards Nature. They looked upon Nature as a medium

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<sup>1</sup> Morse Peckham, "Towards a Theory of Romanticism," British Romantic Poets, ed. Shiv Kumar (London: University of London Press Ltd., 1966), p. 137.

for a transvaluation of existing values and as a herald of a revolution. In the previous chapter I discussed how the Romantics sought to learn the true nature of art from the activities of birds and beasts. In this chapter I hope to dwell on the influence of animate nature in helping the poets rediscover the hitherto unapprehended relation between beauty and truth, between joy and hope.

The Romantic poets valued feeling and imagination as essential to moral life. Thus, Wordsworth in "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" speaks of the imagination as the "mightiest lever/ Known to the moral world."<sup>2</sup> In "Michael", we find that it is the old Michael's intense power of feeling that saves him when he loses his beloved son. Wordsworth further treats of the inextricable connection between imagination and morality when he describes Nature as beautiful in expression and moral in principle. Similarly, Shelley accepts the impact of imagination on morality when he justifies the validity of Greek mythology both as a means of relating to the agencies of the invisible world and as an expression of the imagination. It is through imagination that the Romantics discovered in animate nature the secret of experiencing more keenly the moral beauty of the world and the joy of living.

Their imaginative creation of great poetry in the Romantic period often stems from the recognition that the

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soul's greatness, purity and goodness have their sensuous expression as well. In this chapter I shall concern myself with the presentation of abstract truths through concrete and sensuous forms from animate nature. The Romantics considered the transmission of truth as a "passionate exercise of lofty thoughts ... ~~and~~ truths not standing upon external testimony but carried alive into the heart by passion."<sup>2</sup>. Hence, while Shelley maintained a horror for didactic poetry his encounter with animate nature was ever accompanied by a strain of gentle moralising from the poet's observation of Nature. Similarly, Wordsworth's poetry does not originate from any theological dogma or established creed; still it has its roots in an intimate knowledge of Man and Nature in their moral aspect.

Thus the Romantic encounter with animate nature was conducive to the development of imagination and right reason. Such encounters were not a literary technique - but a habit of mind, an attitude towards life. The Romantic poets often had recourse to animate nature to experience what life really was meant to be - free, natural, peaceful, beautiful and humane. They could not arrive at such clear conceptions in a society addicted to calculating compromise. Man in the 18th century England was blind to some vital elements in human nature. He

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<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth : "Ecclesiastical Sonnets," III, XIX, 1-4.

often disregarded the deep power of joy, of sympathy, of early affections and associations. The task of reinstating these virtues in human consideration proved to be an enormous one for the Romantic poets. They attempted to dramatise successfully the searching mind of man through symbols of birds and animals.

The sentiment of joy which the Romantics considered indispensable, was rarely experienced in the rigid set-up of their society. It had no central place in the prevailing poetic theories of the day. The feeling of the poet was reduced to a joyless emotion. The Romantics, therefore, directed all their attention towards the development of this sentiment of joy. They looked upon joy as the concomitant of creativity, the catalyst of the intermittent moments of unity between Man and Nature. In their poems, therefore, they chose to dwell on a race of creatures accustomed to the joys and comforts of open woodland. The recurrent theme of their poetry was the expression of this joy manifested by birds and beasts in their joyous bearing. In Wordsworth's "To the Cuckoo," for instance, the bird is the associate link in a process by which the poet's imagination is roused to give joy and significance to the world around him. The cuckoo is, thus, for him a symbol of joy.

J.S. Mill, referring to Wordsworth's poetry, speaks of the joy the poet communicates : "I seemed to draw as from

a source of inward joy, of sympathy and imaginative pleasure which could be shared in by all human beings."<sup>3</sup> It is from the joy Wordsworth acquires that he is able to base and reproduce the impression Nature has made on him. The bird cuckoo, as we saw earlier was a perennial source of joy to him. In "The cuckoo of Laverna", he describes the impact of the bird's voice on the monks at Laverna. Its voice falls into the still and silent water of their religious meditation like a pebble and sets up ripples of thought. The cuckoo is here the symbol of meditative joy.

Wordsworth welcomed gaiety and enjoyment in human beings as the very spirit of life. The gay little liars and the Beggar boys are as dear to his heart and to his poetic imagination as Benjamin the Waggoner in his drunken ecstasy. In "Resolution and Independence" he seeks to identify himself with the playful hare and the ecstatic skylark :

Such a happy child of earth am I  
Even as these blissful creatures do I fare.

Wordsworth thus focusses on the sentiment of joy - a joy which is to be won back for man who has lost it.

For Coleridge, as for Wordsworth, the forms of external nature were always a source of reassurance and engrossing

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<sup>3</sup> J.S. Mill, Autobiography, Cited by Herbert Read, "Wordsworth and Philosophical Faith," True Voice of Feeling (London : Faber & Faber, 1950), p. 190.

pleasure. The idea of joy was the mainspring of Coleridges principles, "This is the great cross," he says in one of his letters, "in that my nature is made for joy, impelling me to joyance."<sup>4</sup> Coleridge's attempt to sense the sentiment of joy is well expressed in his "Dejection - an ode." In his early career as a poet he often found this joy in the perception of the creatures from animate nature. The singing lark in "Fears in Solitude" is the emblem of meditative joy. The lover of solitude experiences a sweet sensation of joy at the sight of the lark :

Sweet influences trembled over his frame

...

And dreaming hears thee still, O singing lark

That singest like an angel in the clouds.

Coleridge experiences a similar sensation when he listens to the chirpings of the nightingales in the "The Nightingale - a Conversation Poem." Here he concentrates on the joy arising out of the delights of physical sensation :

That should you close your eyes, you might almost  
Forget it was not day.

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<sup>4</sup> Cited by Humphry House, "Kubla Khan", "Christabel", and "Dejection", British Romantic Poets, ed. Shiv Kumar (London: University of London Press Ltd., 1966), p. 137.

The songs of the nightingale and the lark created a half happy sentiment in him. In the company of birds he experienced the disturbing joy of elevated thoughts.

Animate nature not only created a sentiment of joy in the minds of the poets but a sense of peace as well. It revealed the power by which a soul may achieve peace and restoration in itself. The Romantic poets looked upon the natural world as an organism in which self expression of every unit was intense and of which synthesis was harmony. Thus Keats in "Sleep and Poetry", speaks of the peaceful sensation he experiences in the company of swans and linnets :

Things such as these are ever harbingers  
to trains of peaceful images - the stirs  
of a swan's neck unseen among the rushes  
A linnet starting all about the bushes  
A butterfly, with golden wings broad parted  
nestling a rose.....

For Keats the activities of these creatures are the revelation of a peaceful disposition. They disclose a consistency, energy and beauty which can be considered as proceeding from a sense of inner peace. Birds and beasts by their calmness and peace suggest the power of weaning man away from the hurried, sordid lives into a beneficent and ordered activity of the soul. Thus, the thrush in Keats'

"What the Thrush Said" is more a counsellor of peace than a physical bird :

O! fret not after knowledge I have none  
 And yet my song comes native with the warmth  
 O!fret not after knowledge I have none  
 And yet the evening listens.

Keats considers the bird capable of directing man into the ways of peace and harmony. Man can attain to such harmony, such peace only when he has relinquished all his paltry views, when he has closed his mind to everything obstructive.

Like Keats, Wordsworth discovers the linnet to be a harbinger of peace. It is to him "a presence like the air/ scattering (thy) gladness without care." Wordsworth sought in the demeanour of birds and beasts an "apt emblem for/ reproof of pride" and "ensuring peace."<sup>5</sup> He withdrew into Nature to experience the soothing peace that the creatures of the woodland enjoy. Thus, in one of his miscellaneous poems, he fondly dwells on the intercourse between an imprisoned man and his faithful companion - the bird :

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<sup>5</sup> Wordsworth, "A Flower Garden", ll. 32-35.

Dear intercourse was theirs, day after day  
Think of their common peace, their simple play  
The parting moment and its fond regret.

The sense of peace that the imprisoned man acquired from the bird is so remarkable that he is content to consider the bird as "Some recompense for all that he had lost." The bird is, therefore, an unchanging sign of hope.

Shelley, who repeatedly sought after peace and harmony, often discovered them in animate nature. For instance, he sees in the swan an assured symbol of the triumph of ideals over doubts. Similarly, the skylark is devoid of any "shadow of annoyance." Compared to the troubled song of man the notes of the skylark flow "in such clear stream." Shelley is overcome by the harmony of the song. Like Shelley, Coleridge also approaches Nature to feel its quite quiet and sedate harmony that can hold the mind in a sweet and gentle composure. In "La Fayette," the caged bird is the embodiment of undisturbed peace. Though caged, the bird is still happy to cheer the radiance of the sun and enjoy his fellow birds' freedom - "His fellows' freedom soothes the captive's cares." La Fayette is also described as the herald of a new era. It is a symbol of hope that can "wake with startling voice/Life's better sun from the long wintry night."

Rarely finding an assurance of hope in the world of men, the Romantic poet sought it in the world of birds and beasts. Thus, Wordsworth in "To the Cuckoo" hopes to listen to the bird "till I do beget/that golden time again." And in the poem "The Cuckoo Clock" he dwells on the regenerating hope that the bird can symbolise :

I speak with knowledge - by that voice beguiled  
Though wilt salute old memories as they throng  
Into thy heart; and fancies running wild  
...  
Will make thee happy, happy as a child.

The cuckoo often inspired the poet with the happy memories of childhood. It filled him with the hope for a revival of his childhood joy.

Shelley rarely attains to such hope in the company of birds and beasts. In fact, his perception of the swan as the symbol of domestic happiness has an adverse effect on him. His immediate reflection is on his own hopeless life as an artist :

And what am I that I should linger here  
With voice far sweeter than thy dying notes ...  
.... .... frame more attuned  
to beauty, wasting these surpassing powers  
in the deaf air, to the blind earth and heaven.

inspired by the bird, to possess that "harmonious madness" so that "the world should listen then as I am listening now." The skylark is his hope for artistic perfection.

The Romantic poets were often impressed by the passive loyalty of animals. The dog is a recognized symbol of loyalty, and its loyalty has captured the attention of the poets as well. Thus, Byron in "Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog" seeks to commemorate the memories of the faithful dog. He regrets the fact that the dog for all its virtue is denied recognition both in this life and the next, specially when nothing can measure up to the dog's sense of self-sacrifice!

The poor dog in life the firmest friend  
The first to welcome, foremost to defend

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Unhonoured falls, unnoticed all his worth.

Byron here expresses his design to raise a monument for the dog, to make it a symbol of loyalty.

Wordsworth, similarly, describes the faithfulness of the shepherd's dog in "Fidelity!" The passive loyalty of the beasts is his loving concern in many of the poems. Thus,

in "The White Doe of Rylstone," he pictures the doe resting among the ruins of Abbey, thereby indicating that Nature alone is faithful :

There doth the gentle creature lie  
with those adversities unmoved

The spectacle of the white doe, who in the midst of overwhelming adversity remains faithful and calm, reminds man of the need to practice spiritual tranquillity. In man it must be a conscious practice till it becomes, as Wordsworth shows in the character of Leech gatherer, a natural habit of reacting positively to the processes of life.

The passive loyalty of beasts and birds can be seen not only in relation to man but also in relation to their own kind and finally in their apparent trust in the providence of God. Thus, the young ass in Coleridge's poem is the symbol of filial piety, It is a spectacle of the "patient merit" that "the unworthy takes." Coleridge seeks to surmise the cause for its "dulled spirits" by posing the question :

Is thy sad heart filled with filial pain  
To see thy wretched mother's shortened chain?

Like Coleridge, Shelley in "Alastor" is impressed by the

loving fidelity and domestic bliss that the swans share among themselves. He is moved by the confidence with which the swan sails towards its home :

Thou hast a home beautiful bird  
where thy sweet mate will welcome thy return with eyes  
Bright in the lustre of their own fond joy.

For Shelley, the secret of peace and harmony that the swans "embody" within them essentially rests on their sense of loyalty.

The transvaluation of conventional values was thus made possible through the Romantic emphasis on spontaneous joy, harmony, peace and loyalty. Besides, the emphasis on these virtues, the poets also felt the need to redirect man to a life of simplicity. They acted on the urgency of calling man back from the perverted and ruinous life of towns to the simplicity of Nature. Man needed to be freed of the unimaginative blindness in order to see things in their right perspective. The fearless innocent animal life becomes, therefore, the occasion of a long disquisition on the lesson of simplicity taught by Nature to man.

Wordsworth has many passages on animate nature that reveal the modest simplicity of creatures like the kitten, the stock-dove, the lamb, the water-fowl and the wren. Thus,

in "The Contrast - The parrot and the Wren" he contrasts the simplicity of the "self-contended wren" with the "dazzling Belle" of the "gilded cage." The Wren is contended with the "moss lined shed" of an abode :

Strange places, coverts unendeared,  
She never tried.

The poet ends the poem by designating the Wren as "Nature's Darkling" by virtue of its simplicity. The Wren is a symbolic representation of humble simplicity. The little Kitten, like the Wren, is contended with its lot. In the poem, "The Kitten and falling leaves" the Kitten appears fully absorbed in its own game, thus revealing its singleness of purpose. It stands for a simplicity that has no room for over - consciousness. Instead it is :

Over happy to be proud  
Over wealthy in the treasure  
Of her own pleasure.

Coleridge's skylark likewise is fully absorbed in its song. In the poem "Reflections on having left a place of Retirement", the poet is pleased to acquaint his beloved with the charming simplicity of the skylark's song :

In this chapter I have attempted to examine the Romantic use of animal and bird images as symbolically a source of moral reflections. I have tried to base my findings on the many examples assembled, where the poet seeks to convey moral truths as "the passionate exercise of lofty thoughts."<sup>6</sup> I have shown the Romantic conception of morality, as being closely connected to the poet's idea of feeling and imagination. I have distinguished the Romantic effort at moral development by the poet's intuitive grasp of hitherto unapprehended relations between joy and hope, beauty and truth and by his creation of symbols in order to teach man the power of joy, peace, hope, loyalty and simplicity. I have confined myself to moral virtues demonstrated in the images of beasts and birds. In the next chapter I shall discuss the Romantic aspiration for a transcendental reality as symbolized through the images from animate nature.

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<sup>6</sup> Wordsworth, op. cit., p. 17.

## CHAPTER V

### BIRD AND ANIMAL IMAGES AS SYMBOLS OF TRANSCENDENTAL VISION

"No sound is dissonant which tells of Life"

Coleridge : This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison

In the preceding chapters I dealt with the Romantics' attempt to relate man's emotion to the most beautiful and ensuring objects in his environment. The creatures of animate nature were seen as forms embodying the poet's artistic and moral intuitions. In the present chapter I shall concentrate on the poet's progression from an objective-symbolical description of external Nature to an analysis of inner self. I shall discover how the perception of natural objects set his visionary power in action. Next I will consider how he attempted to invest animate nature with a new and magic light in order to lure man to the realm of the ideal, the eternal.

The Romantic Movement can be interpreted as a prodigious attempt to discover the world of spirit through the unaided effort of the solitary soul. The contemplative position was the favourite posture with the Romantic poet. He contemplated the images that registered themselves through his senses. He aimed at the attainment of an ultimate spiritual unity by way

of the particular in the natural world. Each poet aimed at transcendence by binding the worlds of sight and spirit in a single whole. Thus Coleridge in one of his letters refers to the synthesis of all things into "one" and "indivisible" - "My mind feels as if it ached to behold and know something 'great' something 'one' and 'indivisible'."<sup>1</sup> The artist's grasp of the relationship between the temporal and the eternal is expressed through the considered use of imaginative symbols from animate nature.

The fusion of finite and infinite, matter and spirit was possible since the poet felt himself related to external nature both passively and actively. While Locke in the 17th century maintained that in perception the mind is wholly passive, a mere recorder of impression from without, "a lazy looker on an external world," the Romantics discovered mind to be the governing factor in perception. They recognized that man is not only receptive but he also projects his imagination into Nature and "half creates" the value he finds there. Thus, the song of the nightingale is much more than a mere song. Keats creates it as the symbol of unrestricted, timeless event. The song is immortalised by its association with an unseen world and yet this world appears vivid because it is displayed in a single actual case of the living bird and not in mere abstractions.

<sup>1</sup> Coleridge : "Letters," cited by H.N. Fairchild, "Coleridge's Transcendentalism," The Romantic Quest (New York, Russell & Russell. Inc., 1965), p. 336.

It was through imagination that the poet hoped to reshape the world visualized by his senses. What he referred to as imagination can easily be understood as another term for the transcendental faculty. The transcendentalism of the Romantics was poetic rather than formally philosophical. This is seen in their fondness for drawing analogies between the transcendental faculty and the creative imagination of the artist. Thus Coleridge's "shaping spirit of imagination" is easily carried over from his poetry to his transcendental philosophy without any essential change. Similarly, Wordsworth in Book XIV of "The Prelude" defines imagination as :

another name for absolute power  
and clearest insight ...

Each of the Romantic poets was indeed concerned with a transcendental order, but it was in some sense his own and shared with no one else. Though all emphasise its sense of "eternity," they do not mean the same thing by it and they interpret its manifestations differently. For example, transcendentalism for a poet like Wordsworth was a religious aspiration but for Shelly it meant creating an ideal world of his own.

However individualistic their approach in transcending the real and the actual, the Romantic poets recognized that the

development of man's deeper consciousness was not independent of the phenomenal world or the general consciousness. Even when the Romantic poet carried his love of earth into the air with him his transcendentalism was tinged with descensionalism. He continued to rely on external nature to clarify and give body to inward feeling, to perceive the infinite within the finite. The nature's bestowing of light was no less important to him than its reflection of light. In my study of the Romantic poems addressed to animate nature I shall attempt to arrive at some of their interpretations of the term "transcendentalism." I shall focus on the mind of the poet as the passive and active receptacle of impulses from external nature. I those poems where the poet seeks to merge his vis the beautiful objects of sense.

Of all the Romantics, Blake is the most rigo conception of the imagination. He could confiden power alone makes a poet: Imagination, The Divine was deeply conscious of the spiritual reality at created things. Thus, in "Auguries of Innocence, robin redbreast is itself a spiritual thing - no visible bird, but the power which such a bird emb symbolises."

A Robin Redbreast in a cage

put all Heaven in a rage.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by C.M. Bowra; The Romantic Imagination (University Press, 1964), p. 14.

To deny the bird its freedom of flight, its freedom of song is to deny the free spirit that the bird represents. The bird is the symbol of the free spirit that must triumph over the fettered substance. For Blake ordinary things are unsubstantial in themselves and yet rich as symbols of greater realities.

Similarly the lamb and the tiger are embodiment of divine attributes. The lamb in the poem "The Lamb," is hardly recognized for its own sake but as a creature of the Creator. Blake begins the poem with the question "Little lamb who made thee?" and his answer makes one wonder at his deep consciousness of the Eternal Being. :

He is called by thy name  
for he calls himself a lamb.

In the poem "The Tiger," the animal is the symbol of the awe-inspiring and immortal Being that could frame its "fearful symmetry." To Blake reality is only a symbol and he considers it only to represent the clear and shining outlines of what he sees with the imagination.

Wordsworth often shows great affection and concern for the creatures of animate nature in and for themselves. However, he loves them not only for their visible beauty but

also for the spiritual beauty of which they seem to be the vehicle. Wordsworth was convinced that man's loving imagination cannot do its creative work without fair forms to be made still fairer, and conversely, that man cannot hope to be inspired by animate nature unless he is inwardly attuned to her message. Thus an impulse from animate nature is to him some permanent truth enshrined in an image and revealed to the imagination.

In the poems addressed "To the Cuckoo," and "To a Skylark," we find the poet's focus shifting from the interesting qualities and forms of birds to respond to impressions beyond the range of what the visible form of a bird can normally reveal. He is aroused by the momentary transparency that comes over the external world revealing its inner constitution. Thus the poet makes bold to consider the cuckoo not as a bird but "a wandering voice," thereby alluding to its "omnipresence." It is, "no bird, but an invisible thing." Though it renders its song only for the benefit of the vale, the poet values it as "a tale of visionary hours." The seemingly ubiquitous voice of the cuckoo has an "imaginative influence." It provokes a meditative feeling, And when through the imagination the bird becomes the emblem of mystery and timeless hope, the feeling is given a voice.

For Wordsworth, the bird in the poem "The Green Linnet" is

the "Presiding Spirit." Here again the reference is to the "eternal" the "Omnipresence" of the symbolised bird - "A life, a presence like the air." It is not merely the melodious and exulting strain that carries him into an ecstasy but its very form is dazzling to the poet. He imagines the bird enveloped by "shadows and glimmerings, that cover him all over."

Wordsworth's attempt at sustained spirituality is seen particularly well in the poem "The White Doe of Rylstone." Scott dealing with its episodes of adventure and external turns of fortune, finds the poem a failure. But he cares to add that, "so far as it is moral and spiritual it succeeds."<sup>3</sup> The doe is the natural symbol of the spirit of contemplation. It is painstakingly white and solitary as it watches over Emily's grave. Wordsworth's emphasis on its distinctness and radiancy is to show it, "spotless, beautiful, innocent and loving."

Wordsworth chooses to establish an intercourse with the Absolute through the relative. The bird is often a symbol that seeks to relate the poet to the region of paradise. Thus in the poem "Upon Seeing a Coloured Drawing of the Bird of Paradise in an Album," paradise is described as the "Region that crowns her (bird's) beauty with the name/She (bird) bears for 'us'."

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<sup>3</sup> Cited by Graham Hough, "Wordsworth and Coleridge," The Romantic Poets (London: Hutchison & Co (publishers) Ltd., 1968), p. 88.

The bird seems to transport him to a region "Above a world that deems itself most wise when most enslaved by gross realities." For Wordsworth it is Nature that best reflects the ideal, the eternal. His enjoyment of animate nature was so intense that it could be equated with his religious belief that the supernatural was immanent in the natural. Even in the highly "spiritual" white doe of Rylstone, the apotheosis of the doe is firmly founded on its natural qualities - namely its patience. Wordsworth could see behind natural forms a world of powers and of moral strength. He regarded external objects both for themselves and for "the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal."<sup>4</sup>

Coleridge cares much less than Wordsworth for objects of external nature. He values them only in so far as they "counterfeit infinity." His soaring fancies are not always anchored by a deep-rooted alliance with Nature and common experience. He considers the power of imagination as the only spring-board in the transcending flight beyond the actual and the real. His faith in the creative power of imagination is clearly seen in the lines from "Dejection - an ode," in which he explains that Nature lives only in us and that it is we who create all that matters in her :

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<sup>4</sup> David Perkins, "The Transcendent World," The Quest for Permanence (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1965) p. 139.

Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth  
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud Enveloping  
the Earth ...

Coleridge, however, does not go as far as Blake in seeing creatures of animate nature only as symbols and rarely in their physical reality. Unlike Blake's caged robin redbreast, Coleridge's imprisoned fayette does not put "The Heavens in a rage." Although the bird is the symbol of freedom from slavery, of triumphant victory over dungeon's might, it is also at the same time a reality in its full chorus of a generous song. Similarly, the slimy creatures in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" are an "ugly reality," though they carry the seed of a new life in them. The poem in its treatment of the albatross and water-snakes can be considered as symbolic of a spiritual experience.

Like Wordsworth, Colerdige uses animate nature to give colour, solidity and perspective to his creations. In "To Nature" he regards workship of Nature as a beneficial exercise of the imagination :

It may indeed be fantasy when I  
Essay to draw from all created things  
Deep, heartfelt, inward joy that clings."

For him the simultaneous perception of "inner" and "outer" worlds depended on the sudden disclosure of similitudes in dissimilitudes. Thus, in the poem "To a Young Ass," he can see the parallel between the suffering young ass and suffering God :

For much I fear me that He lives like thee  
Half-famished in a land of luxury.

The ass is in its deprivations      the symbol of the suffering God.

Shelley was not primarily a Nature poet and was rarely content to imitate mundane forms. Instead he was a poet of abstract thought, intense feeling and of "a golden world." His purpose in transcending reality was to insist on some kind of a vision of a better world, to provide mankind with a standard to judge the "real" world. However, the world he creates is all his own and as Bagehot writes he gives us the appearance that "He is not of our home, nor homely; he describes not our world; but that which is common to all worlds - the Platonic idea of a world."<sup>3</sup> Indeed it is evident from his poetry that he had the sentimental notion of Nature common to the Romantic poets. Bees basking in reflected sunlight undoubtedly gave Shelley great pleasure; but their real importance for him was due to the fact that they furnished

<sup>3</sup> Cited by Melvin. T. Solve, Shelley - His Theory of Poetry (New York: Russel & Russell, 1964), p. 163.

a point of departure to a region "more real" than earthly phenomena - namely the world of ideas. In his letter to Peacock he writes "I always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present and tangible objects."<sup>5</sup>

The associations which natural objects call up are for Shelley of far greater importance than are the objects themselves. Thus in the poem "To a skylark" the actual bird is of little significance. What Shelley really appears to be interested in is an "unbodied voice," which he identifies with the "blithe spirit" that never was a bird - "Bird thou never wert." In his representation of the bird, he does not use similes, for the bird is not analogous to a spiritual reality : it is in itself a spiritual reality. Therefore, Shelley resorts to metaphors and puts them to work in an unusual way. The lark becomes invisible and in its invisibility is compared to star, the embodiment of light which also fades from human vision. This fading away of images from mortal eyes is in keeping with Shelley's idea that mortal eyes are unable to see the full splendour of heavenly beauty. When the skylark has merged with transcendence, it becomes unknowable : "What thou art we know not." In the transcendental state the bird seems to acquire a special insight into mortality and death which goes beyond even what man can imagine or dream.

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<sup>5</sup> Shelley : "Letters to Peacock," No.7, 1818.

For Shelley the transcendental act lay in the stripping away of the veil of appearances that hide the ideal reality, a breaking down of that "dome of many-coloured glass" that "stains the white radiance of eternity." Thus Cythna in "The Revolt of Islam" declares :

I tore the veil that hid  
Nature, and truth, and liberty, and love.

Shelley seeks to transcend not merely external forces but also the prison of the self. Such a transcendence is the theme of "Prometheus unbound." In his opening speech Prometheus seems to be on the way to a spiritual regeneration. Thus we find that Shelley takes more delight in the ideal and the abstract than in the special and tangible.

The ideal world of Keats was not like that of Shelley - a scheme of abstractions, but a source of living powers beyond the senses. Ideas as ideas did not greatly interest him. He realised that the mystery of things cannot be penetrated by an act of the will but through the approach of the imagination. When the objects of senses laid their spell upon him he was so stirred and exalted that he felt himself transported into another world. The beauty of visible things carried Keats into ecstasy, though he was seldom drawn to spiritual beauty in the strict sense of the term. But he worshipped sensuous beauty so

intensely that it acquired quasi-spiritual values in his mind.

Thus although the nightingale appeals to him as an actual living bird it also becomes in the poem an "immortal bird," belonging to a world where the poet cannot follow except through his imagination. The bird lures him to "fade far away, dissolve and quite forget," to enter a visionary world of immortal and unmingled bliss. This impulse is all the more strengthened by the poet's recollection of the "weariness, the fever and the fret," of mortal experience. In the visionary world of the nightgale there is not the luminous light but "embalmed darkness." The poet can no longer see with his physical vision - "I cannot see what flowers are at my feet." Keats' flight into the invisible world, however, is rather tentative. His approach to the visionary imagination is beset by doubts and hesitations - "Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well/As she is famed to do." Keats, is more familiar with the concrete and the sensuous rather than with the abstract and the infinite.

Thus each poet of the Romantic period interpreted the term "transcendentalism" in his own way. I have tried to show how they transported themselves into the visionary land through their response to the unrecognized appeal of natural phenomena of animate nature. Their attachment to the imaginative faculty was as absorbing as their passion for an unseen spiritual order. Each of the poets created for himself an ideal world to find cure for his discontent. But often with poets like Shelley the impulse to

escape was so powerful that he surrendered to it and did not care what relations his dreams might have to the common world. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was seldom fanciful. Fancy he considered as thoughtless and superficial in contrast to imagination which he valued as contemplation. Wordsworth could, therefore, boldly assert, "I never (gave) way to my own feelings in personifying natural objects or investing them with sensations without bringing all that I have said to a rigorous after-test of good sense, as far as I was able to determine what good sense is."<sup>6</sup> We see the truth of this statement in the example of the transformation of the cuckoo into a mystery. It was based on meditative response to the voice of an unseen bird. In the poem the invisibility of the bird justifies the epithet of "a wandering voice."

Thus Romantic approach to transcendence, though varied in character, has enriched our appreciation of the familiar world and awakened a new awe and wonder at it. It has created a world so absorbing and exalting, that in it man can move from the state of discontent to a sublime vision, such that, "the many defects of the given world are seen to be irrelevant and insignificant in comparison with the mysteries which enclose it."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Wordsworth: (Ly, I, 436-437), ed. de Selincourt (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1937).

<sup>7</sup> C.M. Bowra, "The Romantic Achievement," The Romantic Imagination (London : Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 292.

## CONCLUSION

"By passing out into the non-human world, the life of trees and flowers and animals, man (can) get rid of devouring egoism ..."<sup>1</sup>

This quotation from the sacred writings of Zen Buddhism has special relevance when summing up the Romantics' approach to birds and animals. Romantic poetry is essentially a poetic treatment of this statement in its suggestion of the transcendental influence of Nature.

The Romantics themselves are reckoned among the greatest non-conformists and individualists on account of their stress on personal sentiments and their refusal to stay within the conventional ways of thought. They refused to conform because of the disparity they discovered between "appearance", and "reality." This disparity urged them to create a "reality," for themselves. And as Jacob Wasserman remarks "Reality in the artists' sense is always something created; it does not exist a priori.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Julian Gitzen, "Gary Snyder and the Poetry of Compassion," Critical Quarterly, No. 4 (Winter 1973), pp. 341-348.

History records similar attempts of the various revolutionaries, religious reformers, artists and philosophers to create "a reality", of their own. Some of them often assumed the role of discoverers of "truth." Rarely finding that truth in contemporary reality they created ideal states to arrive at their own concept of truth. They often chose non-human agents to convey their idea of truth. Thus, the Fabulists created animal stories to explain the moral needs of the day; a religious teacher like Christ spoke to people through parables; the Romantic poet chose apt animal symbols to concretize his concept of the ideal world. What is common to many of these reformers is the choice of the familiar images of birds and beasts in their presentation of reality.

In the first chapter I have discussed how Aesop wrote his tales with a deliberate double meaning for the purpose of teaching morals. Thus, he chose such characters as the fox and the crow in order to teach man the evils of flattery.

Similarly, in the Bible, Christ points to the birds to impress on man the great lesson of simplicity - "Look at the birds flying around: they do not sow seeds, nor gather a harvest and put it in barns. Yet your father in heaven takes care of them." The Bible records many more examples where animals and birds appear as models of virtue. In the first chapter, I have referred to man's similar attempts to embody his abstract

thoughts and sentiments into images in order to render them concrete and immediate. For this purpose I have illustrated the employment of bird and animal images in few literary works. This survey extends from the ancient to the Romantic period.

When we come to the Romantic period, we find the poets plumbing the depths of Nature to reach the inner man beneath the exterior appearances. The Augustan emphasis on superficial appearance had rendered man incapable of imagining himself outside his ego. Man seldom felt the need to withdraw his attention from the practical mundane affairs in order to concentrate it upon the inner life. Instead he focussed on the affectations and fashions of the day.

In the second chapter I have dwelt on the Augustan attitude towards animate nature. Through the various examples of bird and animal images employed in Augustan poetry, I have tried to bring out their superficial view of Nature. I have tried to show how the poet's observation of external nature was lacking in precision and depth. For the Augustan poet, it was immaterial whether the "facts" of nature which he illustrated were really facts or superstitions. Thus, Pope in "Essay on Man" contrives the following couplet where he is either referring to moles or birds.

The latent tracts, the giddy height explore,  
Of all who blindly creep or soar.

Here the image is created on the basis of the medieval notion that all birds except the eagle blind themselves by looking at the sun. Such an example justifies the criticism that the poet has applied ~~but~~ a limited attention to subjects from which great and generous feelings could be derived. It is his estrangement from nature that foiled all his attempts at exteriorizing man's inner conflict in intelligible terms.

The Romantic achievement lies not in what the poet said of Nature, but in what they revealed of man. The Romantic poet considered man as the measure of all things, as the centre of all his interest. In his attempt to reveal man to himself, he often employed new images and symbols with new meanings. He employed a logic of symbols which is the artist's rough equivalent to the rational logic of the philosopher.

The Romantic poets created symbols in the belief that they can "hold in balance the widest reach of reality." In an age beset with rigid conventions and calculated reasoning, man needed to be awakened to reality through the imaginative use of symbols - "when the world of man is harsh, repugnant the poet is apt to seek consolation in the world of nature which

does not need reforming."<sup>2</sup> It is to animate nature that the Romantic poet turned to create a "reality" through the symbolisation of bird and animal images.

In the third and the following two chapters I have cited many examples to illustrate the Romantic poet's creation of symbols. His creation of symbols from animate nature was meant to be the lever for man's spiritual awareness, a means to elevate man from his materialistic views to a higher aesthetic, moral, and spiritual plane. It was in the corresponding characteristics of Nature in relation to art, moral virtues and the transcendental world that the poet based his claim for a symbolic presentation. In the third chapter I have pointed out how birds and beasts are described more as objects of art, than for their merely physical attributes. Thus, Shelley makes his skylark a non-entity - "Bird thou never wert" and again he says "what thou art we know not." His guess, nearest reality is that the bird is a "poet hidden in the light of thought." Similarly, Keat's nightingale is immortal in character. The bird is immortal in its song, and its song has a universal quality about it :

The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperors and clowns.

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<sup>2</sup> Gitzén, op. cit., p. 5.

The qualities of permanence, universality and beauty that they established in animate nature encouraged them to strike at the correspondence between nature and art. It enabled them to saturate the images from animate nature with symbolic significance.

In the fourth chapter I have discussed the Romantics' attempt to evolve from animate nature symbols of moral virtues like peace, joy, fidelity and simplicity. The dove, for example, is an acknowledged symbol of peace; the dog of fidelity. The Romantics have further associated birds like the skylark with the sentiment of joy; animals like the doe in Wordsworth's "White Doe at Rylstone" with fidelity. The Romantics' treatment of virtues like joy and simplicity proved crucial in an age that sterilized the feelings of poets to a joyless and artificial emotion. The Romantics valued the creatures of animate nature as reflecting the practical and moral needs of man. Thus, Wordsworth in "The Prelude" seeks to "give a moral life" to every aspect of nature :

I gave a moral life. I saw them feel  
or linked them to some feeling.

For the Romantics the symbols appeared so fully satisfying that they often failed to realise that they were speaking in symbolic terms and so confused their symbols with the reality

that they represented. This is especially true with regard to their creation of the transcendental world.

In the fifth chapter I have discussed how, for Poets like Blake and Shelley, birds and beasts were mere shining outlines for what they visualised with their imagination. Thus, Blake's tiger is the frame-work of a "fearful symmetry" while the robin redbreast puts "all heaven in a rage." In their attempt to coalesce all things into "one" and "indivisible" they created symbols. They were convinced that the relation of time and eternity could not be expressed in simple rational terms but only through symbols. They, therefore, employed symbols from animate nature for "the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal."<sup>3</sup> Wordsworth, for example, takes pains to picture the doe in its distinctness and radiancy in order to strike a parallel between the doe and the luminous world of transcendental vision. The doe is also shown to be "spotless, beautiful, innocent and loving." The images from animate nature are thus rendered capable of assimilating ideal abstractions. They form the fulcrum for the pervading sentiments. What is distinctly Romantic is the creation of images in their authentic nature, while employing them for a discourse on art, moral virtue and transcendental vision.

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<sup>3</sup> David Perkins, op. cit., p. 73.

In this dissertation I have discussed at length the Romantics' employment of images of animate nature to develop their idea of artistic, moral and transcendental world. I have tried to show how their choice of images from animate nature was governed by the fact that they could discover a unique correspondence between animate nature on one hand and the world of art, moral virtue and transcendental vision on the other; and also by the fact that as archetypal images they had already acquired considerable symbolic significance. For this purpose I have traced the archetypal patterns of response to animate nature from the primitive times. I have shown that this tendency to employ animal and bird images to develop some aspect of the human world has been a universal trend.

This trend has continued in the modern period. Although it is not a part of my dissertation, I wish to quote few literary works, subsequent to the Romantic poetry. Bird and animal images have continued to exert a pull over the imagination of modern writers as Yeats "Leda and the swan," Henrik Ibsen "The Wild Duck," George Orwell "Animal Farm" and Jack London's "The Call of the Wild." In the 20th century we experience the tendency of poets like D.H. Lawrence, Emily Dickinson and Edith Sitwell to exploit the many superstitious beliefs built around images of birds and beasts. Thus, D.H. Lawrence in "Snake" subtly suggests the potential menace

of the snake but he also manages to show how beauty and menace are ambivalently one in the snake. The modern poet, like the Romantics, is inclined to see more than the physical reality, to believe more than what superstitious or conventional thinking can suggest.

The significance of the Romantic approach to animate nature lies in the poet's attempt to establish the Organic unity of the universe. As I stated earlier, the conjunction of Nature, Man and the Creator was a fascinating discovery for the Romantics. The worlds of Nature and Man were looked upon as united under some great scheme of things, and as being informed by the supreme creative energy. Many poems of this period can be cited to prove the poet's persistence on this triangular unity, particularly the poems addressed to animate nature. Such persistence has been instrumental in fostering in man a reverence for life in all its forms - a reverence that manifests itself particularly in the accurate observation and the skillful care with which the artist finds the right symbols and the right rhythm to convey what he sees.

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